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Downtrends in Denominational Preferences Level Off

PRINCETON, N.J.--The percentage of adults who give their denominational preference as Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian has levelled off in the last few years after sharp declines in the 1970s and 1960s.

While those who give their preference as Baptist has shown little change over the two decades measured, the proportions in three of the four mainline churches -- Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian -- has fallen off by one-third. The decline has been less precipitous among Lutherans.

It is important to bear in mind that these annual Gallup audits focus on *preference* and not *membership*.

Here is the trend for the major Protestant groupings:

Protestant Church Preferences

	Baptist	Methodist	Lutheran	Presbyterian	Episcopalian
	%	%	%	%	%
1986	20	9	5	2	2
1985	20	10	6	2	2
1984	20	9	7	2	3
1983	21	10	7	3	2
1982	19	10	6	4	2
1981	19	10	6	4	2
1980	19	10	6	4	2
1979	19	11	6	4	2
1978	19	11	6	4	2
1976	21	11	7	5	3
1975	20	11	7	5	3
1974	21	14	7	6	3
1969	20	14	7	6	3
1967	21	14	7	6	3

Little Change in Major Faiths

The 1986 audit also indicates little change in recent years in the relative strength of major faiths in this country, with 59% in the latest series of surveys giving their religious preference as Protestant, 27% as Roman Catholic, 2% as Jewish and 2% indicating their religious preference or affiliation to be The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

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How Does God Speak to People Today?

By Ken Briggs

God speaks to modern people through the Bible and by way of internal feelings, according to a majority of Americans polled by Gallup recently.

Nearly six out of 10 surveyed for the Christian Broadcasting Network said that the Scriptures and inner impressions were the chief means by which God spoke today. Three out of 10 said God chose to communicate through another person.

Asked how God spoke "during the time of the Bible," responses divided about evenly among three forms: out loud, through other people, and by way of internal feelings or impressions. About half of those polled listed one of those means.

By comparison, only 12 percent said God speaks out loud today.

Respondents were also asked whether God had ever spoken to them. Forty-four percent answered "yes" and 50 percent, "no." "Born-again Christians" were far more likely than other groups to respond in the affirmative, with 64 percent saying God had spoken to them. Catholics, as a group, were the least likely to indicate they had had such an experience. Thirty-four percent of the Catholic respondents said they had, compared to 48% of Protestants.

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Those who say they have no religious preference, 8%, statistically matches last year's figure of 9%. The current figure, however, is significantly higher than the 2% recorded in 1967. The annual audit of religious preference (for major faiths) was initiated by The Gallup Poll in 1947.

Here is the question and the findings for 1986:

What is your religious preference — Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, or an Orthodox Church such as Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?

Religious Preferences

Protestant	59%
Roman Catholic	27
Jewish	2
Mormon (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)	2
Orthodox Church	*
Other	2
None	9

* Less than one percent

Here is the four-decade trend. Specific figures for the Mormon and Orthodox Churches are omitted because of insufficient historical data, and are included under the "other" category.

Religious Preferences

	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Other	None
	%	%	%	%	%
–Yearly–					
1986	59	27	2	4	8
1985	57	28	2	4	9
1984	57	28	2	4	9
1983	56	29	2	4	9
1982	57	29	2	4	8
1981	59	28	2	4	7
1980	61	28	2	2	7
1979	59	29	2	2	8
1977-78	60	29	2	1	8
1976	61	27	2	4	6
1975	62	27	2	4	6
1974	60	27	2	5	6
–By 5-year periods–					
1972	63	26	2	4	5
1967	67	25	3	3	2
1962	70	23	3	2	2
1957	66	26	3	1	3
1952	67	25	4	1	2
1947	69	20	5	1	6

NOTE: Results for some years do not add to 100% because of rounding.

The 1986 religious preference figures are based on in-person interviews with 8,203 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation.

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Fewer Know Someone Else To Whom God Has Spoken

At the same time, a somewhat smaller percentage of the total sample reported knowing someone else to whom God had spoken. Thirty nine percent said they knew of someone, while 57 percent said they did not. By a 52 to 37 percent margin, blacks were more likely than whites to say they know of such a person. Protestants were far more likely to say so than Catholics by a margin of 45 to 26 percent.

The question of how God conveys thoughts and insights to people is as old as religion itself. The earliest Hebrew Scriptures are replete with accounts of God's summoning of a long line of prophets, priests, and ordinary people. These stories leave an impression of immediate, verbal communication between a commanding God and his subjects whose highly personal and dramatic quality contributed to a lasting image of direct contact, or speaking out loud.

The survey suggests that American Christians keep these images confined largely to the times of the patriarchs. The sample of 1,013 Americans over the age of 18 is far more prone to understand God as a message-giver who works through the inspiration of the Bible, the words and examples of other people, and the prompting of the inner spirit.

The survey also offers a clue about the increasing individual nature of American religious experience. Fewer people could say for sure whether they knew others who had heard directly from God than reported hearing from God themselves. One explanation is that people have experiences of a deeply spiritual nature but are reticent about telling others about them or asking others about them.

Evangelicals: Political Choices, Key Concerns, Views on U.S. Trends

Recent Gallup surveys show that evangelicals are slightly more inclined to identify with the GOP than are non-evangelicals and fewer say they are Independents.

Here are the findings in tabular form, based on the choices of registered voters:

Political Party Affiliation
(Based on registered voters)

	Total U.S.	Evangelicals	Non-evangelicals
Democrats	41%	43%	40%
Republicans	34	38	32
Independents	25	19	28
	100%	100%	100%

Excludes "others" and "none."

Stand on Issues

Evangelicals are twice as likely (83%) as non-evangelicals (41%) to say that religion is "very important" in their lives. Furthermore, evangelicals and non-evangelicals differ markedly on personal and moral issues. For example, evangelicals are nearly 4-to-1 of the opinion that homosexual relations between consenting adults should not be legal, while non-evangelicals are evenly divided on the issue.

Despite these differences, evangelicals and non-evangelicals are in general agreement on the top issues facing the nation, with economic and international issues rating high with both groups, as shown in the following table:

What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?

Most Important Problem

	Total U.S.	Evangelicals	Non-evangelicals
Unemployment, recession	23%	28%	21%
International tensions, fear of war	22	15	24
Budget deficit	13	12	13
Drug abuse	8	9	7
Economy (general)	7	5	8
Poverty, hunger	6	8	6
High cost of living, taxes	4	4	4
Crime	3	3	3
Moral, religious decline	3	8	1
All others	23	21	22
No opinion	3	2	3
	115%	115%	112%

Totals add to more that 100% due to multiple responses.

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In addition, both groups express about the same degree of satisfaction with trends in the nation as a whole and in their own personal lives, as seen in the following table:

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S. at this time?

Outlook Toward Nation

	Total U.S.	Evangelicals	Non-evangelicals
Satisfied	58%	57%	57%
Dissatisfied	38	37	39
No opinion	4	6	4
	100%	100%	100%

In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in your personal life?

Outlook Toward Personal Life

	Total U.S.	Evangelicals	Non-evangelicals
Satisfied	84%	81%	86%
Dissatisfied	14	17	12
No opinion	2	2	2
	100%	100%	100%

Who Are the Evangelicals?

In assessing the findings it is important to bear in mind that evangelicals include a high proportion of blacks, who are overwhelmingly Democratic in their political orientation. Evangelicals also include a disproportionately high percentage of Protestants and Southerners. Here is the question and results:

Would you describe yourself as a "born-again" or evangelical Christian, or not?

Percent of Evangelicals in Each Group

NATIONAL	32%
Men	29
Women	36
Whites	31
Blacks	44
18-29 years	29
30-49 years	32
50 & older	35
College graduates	17
College incomplete	32
High school graduates	34
Not H.S. graduates	38
$40,000 & over	24
$25,000-$39,999	31
$15,000-$24,999	36
Under $15,000	37
Protestants	45
Catholic	16
East	19
Midwest	31
South	48
West	28

Most of the findings are based on interviews with 792 self-described evangelicals and 1,725 non-evangelicals, out of a total sample of 2,517 adults, 18 and older. The interviews were conducted in scientifically selected localities across the nation in an in-person survey July 11-14 and a telephone survey Sept. 3-17. For results based on the total sample and for the subsample of non-evangelicals, one can say that 19 times out of 20 the error attributable to sampling and other random effects should not exceed 3 percentage points in either direction. For results based on the subsample of evangelicals an allowance of plus or minus 5 points should be made for sampling error.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *These statements conform to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

Few Teens Say They Have Used Crack

Only 1 percent of U.S. teens say they have tried crack, but many say they believe that at least some teens at their school have used the dangerous drug, according to the latest Gallup Youth Survey.

Three teens in four say they believe there are at least some students at their school who have tried crack. This includes 5 percent who estimate that a "very large number" have used it, and 55 percent who think only a few students have tried it. One teen in five (21 percent) believes there are no students at his school who have tried crack, while 5 percent say they don't know if any have used the substance.

Recent Gallup Youth Surveys show that 4 percent of students have tried cocaine, and 24 percent have experimented with marijuana.

Young women are far more likely than young men to say they believe there are students at their school who have tried crack. Nine percent of the young women believe that a very large number of students at school have tried it, but only 1 percent of the young men share this belief. Twice as many young women (18 percent) as young men (9 percent) say there is a fairly large number of students who have tried crack.

Estimate of Number of Students Who Have Tried Crack

	Very large number	Fairly large number	Only a few	None	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
NATIONAL	5	14	55	21	5
Male	1	9	58	28	4
Female	9	18	53	14	6
Ages 13 to 15	6	13	54	21	6
Ages 16 to 17	4	14	56	22	4
White	4	14	58	20	4
Black	6	11	46	26	11
White-collar background	4	11	60	20	5
Blue-collar background	6	12	54	24	4
East	6	9	59	20	6
Midwest	3	12	54	27	4
South	7	14	54	18	7
West	3	20	56	19	2

Among young men, 58 percent believe only a few students have tried crack, and 28 percent say none have tried the substance. By comparison, 53 percent of young women feel there are only a few who have tried crack, and 14 percent say none have tried it.

Only minor differences in estimates of the number of students who have tried crack are noted according to the demographic characteristics of teens.

Regionally, teens in the South (21 percent) and West (23 percent) are the most likely to believe that at least a fairly large number of students at their school have tried crack. In the East and Midwest the proportion sharing this belief is 15 percent. Midwestern teens (27 percent) are more likely than those in other regions (19 percent) to say that none of the students at their school have ever tried crack.

Here is how the questions about crack were asked:

What proportion of the students at your school would you guess have tried crack: none, only a few, a fairly large number, or a very large number?

Have you ever tried crack?

The findings reported today are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 528 teen-agers, 13 through 17, conducted from October through December 1986.

Expected Changes in the Catholic Church In Next 20 Years

When a national sample of Catholics were asked what changes they expected to see in the Catholic Church in the United States over the next 20 years, no more than 11% expected any one particular change. But if the whole range of responses is examined, it is seen that the changes cited often enough to be categorized were all in the liberal direction: ordination of women and married men; changed attitudes in birth control, abortion, and divorce; greater lay participation; a general "liberal change" category.

While 12% said there would be no changes over the next twenty years, these findings indicate that there is no expectation among American Catholics of a retrenchment — there is no expectation of a turning back on Vatican II.

Following are the results:

Expected Changes in the Catholic Church In the U.S.A. in the Next 20 Years

More liberal	11%
Ordination of women priests	10
Change (unspecified)	7
Laity more involved in church decisions	6
Greater acceptance of divorce	6
More liberal on birth control	5
Growth	5
More concern/help for others	4
Allow marriage of priests	3
Attitude on abortion	3
More understanding/acceptance of people	3
Miscellaneous	14
No changes	12
Don't know	31

(Results reported in *The American Catholic People, Their Beliefs, Practices, and Values*, by George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1987.)

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